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Dear members of the Great Lakes and Environment and the Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs committees:

I am a member of the Citizens Committee for Michigan State Parks. I have lived and worked in Sault Ste. Marie for nearly 30 years as its Director of Economic Development and City Planning. I write to you in strong support of the State Parks funding proposal before you today.

I believe you have in your hands not only one of the most progressive proposals for natural resource protection and tourism development this state has ever seen, but an elegant opportunity for our citizens to vote with their wallets for something we all in Michigan value highly - our beautiful State Parks.

We are keenly aware of the financial condition the State is in. It seems there has always been a financial crisis in the State, and always some worthy cause attracts the legislative attention - and funding. The result - the State Parks system is always barely saved at the last minute by another band-aid, to barely carry it through to the next year - and on to the next budget crisis! As you are probably aware, Michigan ranks last nationally in General Fund (tax) support for state parks with no General Fund support since 2004, but it ranks second in overnight park attendance. We need to change this.

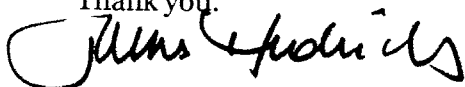
The one thing I want to emphasize (other than the very significant "opt-out" provision) is the dire need for maintenance and facility replacement at the State Parks, and how this proposal will address that need. The Citizens Committee got involved in developing this license plate proposal only from the standpoint that we needed to find some stable and long-term source of funds for the parks, or the system would continue to deteriorate and gradually fall apart. One of the first efforts of the Citizens Committee was to identify what the infrastructure needs of the parks were. When we added up the needs, on a park-by-park basis, the total was staggering - \$341 million!

The beauty of this proposal is that, under a 65% rate, we will be able to attack this huge capital need on an annual basis with up to \$35 million per year (on a 65% participation rate - even more if the participation rate is higher) while continuing to fund the annual operations of the park system.

The License Plate proposal is the best way to meet this funding need; it doesn't reach into the general fund, it doesn't interfere with other State funding needs, it has long-term stability, and most important - if you don't want to pay - you can opt out.

I appreciate the committee's interest in this matter.

Thank you.



James F. Hendricks, AICP